



DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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TO: The Secretary

FROM: EA - John H. Holdridge

SUBJECT: Proposed POW/MIA Mission to Vietnam and Laos

BUREAU OF EAST ASIAN  
AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS

We and DOD have proposed an MIA mission to Hanoi and Vientiane to generate additional pressure on the governments of Vietnam and Laos to provide the fullest possible accounting for Americans missing in action in those countries. This mission would also serve the very useful domestic purpose of reassuring the families of MIA's that we are pursuing this goal through as many means as possible. A mission, clearly structured only to heighten pressure on the POW/MIA question and not to negotiate wider issues, would be consistent with our overall policy of keeping pressure on Vietnam to act in accordance with international standards of behavior.

Sending a special mission to Hanoi and Vientiane to press for a proper accounting for MIA's would symbolize the commitment of the Reagan Administration to take new initiatives to resolve this matter. Congressional and MIA/League of Families pressure to undertake new initiatives is strong. You may recall that in your confirmation hearings Senator Zorinsky asked what steps you would take to resolve the MIA issue and sought your assurances that you would do all in your power to resolve the MIA issue.

The mission would be more than symbolic, however. The recent return of three sets of remains by Hanoi and Senator Hayakawa's recent visit to Vientiane have created opportunities in both countries which we should explore for possible movement on this difficult issue. The proposed mission would be instructed to explore further these possibilities within clearly defined limits.

I am aware that the signal sent by such a mission might be ambiguous. Hanoi would certainly attempt to sow confusion among our ASEAN friends as to U.S. intentions. Special precautions would have to be taken. We would have to discuss the mission early on with ASEAN and fully apprise them of the results. The announcement of the mission and instructions to its members would make clear that the scope of the mission would be strictly limited to POW/MIA matters. No political or economic matters would be discussed and normalization of SRV-US relations would be an explicitly forbidden topic. The

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composition of the proposed mission would reinforce this approach.  
The mission would be headed by a Defense Department Deputy Assistant Secretary (Rich Armitage). The DAS level is high enough that domestic critics will accept it as going beyond that of the professional level JCRC visits, but not so high that the mission could be seen as having a broader mandate. No policy-level Department of State official would be included.

We have consistently maintained that progress should be made on resolving humanitarian issues, such as MIA's and family reunification through the Orderly Departure Program, without linkage to other matters. I believe the opportunities for progress in resolving this issue should be created and exploited. I also believe that sending a mission to urge Hanoi and Vientiane to meet their humanitarian obligations to account for missing Americans is fully consonant with our overall policies toward Vietnam and Laos. It might also yield practical results.

FYI: Secretary Weinberger has now signed the memorandum to the President and it will be delivered to the Department for your decision shortly. Copy is attached.

ATTACHMENT

Draft Memorandum.

Drafted: EA/VLK:BSHarvey:jy  
8/25/81:x23132  
Clearances: EA/VLK:LDAnderson  
EA:Marmacost  
S/P:SRandolph

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